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ABSTRACT

In the Spring of 1973, American television news editors were surveyed for data on staff size, operating budgets, work roles, camera equipment, portable VTR equipment, wire services, mobile equipment, and number of newscasts. The data obtained are reported in five levels of operating budgets with a summary of the statistics for each area of news gathering and reporting capability. The data indicate operating budgets rise directly with staff size and equipment holdings. Data on motion picture equipment holdings and on intentions to purchase new equipment indicate that the 16mm motion picture camera remains the basic television news tool with little or no trend developing toward portable VTR or 8mm equipment. The data also indicate that middle-class stations ($100,000 to $199,999 annual operating budget) tend to spend a higher proportion of their efforts in news processing as opposed to news reporting and that 43 percent of television news personnel work in "large" departments with annual budgets of $300,000 or more. (Author/RB)

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Work Roles, News Gathering Equipment, and Newscasts in Current U.S. Television News Departments

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Recent research has shown the importance of the television newscast and focused on news selection -- the broadcast news gatekeeper. However, research in news department facilities, and the attempts of departments to gather and present the news has been neglected.

In the Spring of 1973 questions concerning television news department equipment and work forces were included in a more general questionnaire given two mailings to a random sample of 300 television news directors in the 1972 Broadcasting Yearbook. A return of 66% accumulated. Five of the returns--stations without news departments--were discarded. The remaining 192 questionnaires contributed to the data. A display of the number of departments, staff sizes, and pertinent percentages and ranges is presented by operating budget

in Table 1. In 1965, Kroeger reported over half the

Table 1 about here

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stations in the country had news budgets of less than $100,000.[1] Only 42% of these respondents indicated their budget was less than that this year. Thus, while it is difficult to account for the impact of inflation on news operations, the budgets of today's departments seem to be higher.

As one might expect, the news staff sizes rise with operating budgets. From a low department size of 0 (news director only), staffs range to a high of 80 (in one owned-and-operated department). The 192 stations full time staff total of (1,969) yields an average of 10 news people per department--not including the 192 news directors. Notable is the fact the news departments in the top budget category departments (15%) employ 43% of the total personnel in the sample, while the lowest three budget category stations (71%), employ only 36% of the news personnel reported (Table 1). More than half of the staffers in these data (65%) work in departments with budgets of $200,000 or more.

The directors were asked to (1) give the number of news personnel working full time (35 hours a week or more) in their department, (2) report the personnel working primarily in the roles of editor, cameraman, reporter, anchorman, or "other", and (3) list the roles of those who "double" in any role combinations. The results of these questions are reported in Table 2.

Table 2 about here

The traditional belief one "doubles" less and specializes more as one rises to larger departments is not given overwhelming support by Table 2(b). The percentages of full time roles is at 63% of the total in budget category I, but falls to 32% in III (Table 2), to rise again in categories IV and V. Thus, "doubling" seems a more important part of "middle class" stations than in lower budgeted ones.

News people in category III may also have more of a variety of roles to perform. Most mentioned second roles were air-anchor work and camera work. These roles make up a small amount (11% and 27%, Table 2d) of a relatively high percentage of double roles in III.

Table 3 reports average holdings of several types

Table 3 about here

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of equipment used by these stations, and the directors' estimates of their next major equipment purchases. Again, equipment increases with operating budgets. The film camera remains the major tool of the television newsman, with the 16mm SOF camera and the automobile, with and without two-way radio, tending to mark the high budget department. The still camera is almost equally available at every level.

In 1966, Schuneman reported that the 16mm silent motion picture camera was the "most standard" piece of photographic equipment in the newsroom.[2] At that time, also, 10% of the stations owned "one or two" portable video tape recorders, and it appeared portable electronic cameras and recording equipment might become even more important.[3] The current data indicate the VTR has not replaced film, however, and the reports of intents to purchase equipment (Table 3) indicates less than 1% of all current news directors see portable VTR equipment in their immediate future. Only 9% now report

they own portable VTR equipment, and 7% say they own only one recorder.

At the same time, 49% of them (Table 3) have plans to buy 16mm sound-on-film cameras, while only 1% show interest in buying new VTR units. They show more interest (17%) also in engineering equipment--such as color film processors--and color chain equipment. Some smaller stations (27%), evidently unable to afford this equipment before, are now planning purchases of this type.

In 1966 the largest percentage of departments (33%) with silent cameras had only one. The largest groups using 16mm sound cameras (19%) had two. Currently, the largest percentage of those owning 16mm silent cameras (28%) holds 6 to 8, 28% also report they own two sound cameras. (Table 4).

Table 4 about here

Since 1966 (and the advent of color television?) the Polaroid camera has lost in favor in TV news departments while the 35mm still camera has gained. A high 56% of the stations report they have no Polaroids, while only 14% indicate they were without them in 1966.[4]

Thirty-four percent of the stations reporting in 1966 were without 35mm cameras,[5] while only 18% of these directors report being without them.

Table 5 reports holdings in 16mm silent and sound

Table 5 about here

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motion picture equipment by budget level and percentages of departments. Again. budget category III produces a slight "jog" in the trends with most stations (46%) in II reporting two SOF cameras, and most in III (49%) also reporting two SOF cameras.

The average number of newscasts each department produced, by budget level, and overall, is reported in Table 6.

Table 6 about here

Category III departments produce the highest average number of 15 minutes newscasts, while producing almost as many thirty minute 'casts. There is a relatively high percentage of editors and anchormen in these departments, and fewer reporters than in other categories

(Table 2). Analysis of the respondent's wire service subscriptions reveals 44% of the departments in III have two or more wires, while 36% of the departments have IV and 33% of those in V have that many. Thus, many news operations of group III may expend a high proportion of their time and energy in news program production--as compared to news gathering.

But if the departments in this category seem relatively low in news coverage ability, the data underscore the fact the U.S. television news department is far more than a "rip and read" operation. Only 15% of all the full time news personnel are listed as anchormen, and work roles in news coverage--reporting and filming--comprise 64% of the reported staffs. (Table 1).

In summary we can say the "average" U.S. television news department has one full time editor, two full time reporters, almost two full time cameramen, and one anchorman. The staff is supplemented by four other news people who double in two or more of these roles, and especially in air work and camera work. The department most likely has two 16mm silent and two sound cameras,

(63%, Table 3), the use of three to six automobiles, some two-way radios, and subscribes to two wire services. It produces about two five minute newscasts, maybe one 15 minute 'cast, and one or two 30 minute 'casts each working day.

A more thorough study of the in-department work roles, as well as research into staff turn-over in television news departments is now underway.

"Footnotes"

1. Peter M. Sandman, David M. Rubin, and David B. Sachsman, Media, An Introductory Analysis of American Mass Communications (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1972) p. 281.

2. R. Smith Schuneman, "Visual Aspects of Television News: Communicator, Message, Equipment," Journalism Quarterly, 43:2 (1966), p. 285.

3. Schuneman, pp. 285-286.

4. Schuneman, p. 285.

5. Schuneman, p. 285.

Table 1

Staff Size and Averages in U.S. TV News Departments

Budget Category		News Dept. TV (TV-R)	Sample %	Staff Size No	Average	Sample %	Range
I	0 to $50,000	48(8)	25	109	2	6	0-8
II	$50,000 to $99,999	33(7)	17	172	5	9	2-22
III	$100,000 to $199,999	55(6)	29	408	7	21	3-15
IV	$200,000 to $299,999	28(2)	15	435	16	22	5-18
V	$300,000 and over	28(3)	15	845	28	43	12-80
	Overall	192(26)	100	1,969	10	100	0-80

Table 2

Full Time Staff in TV News Work Roles

a. Numbers of Full Time Staffers

Budget Category	Editor	Reporter	Cameraman	Anchorman	Other	Total
I	8	30	13	15	3	69
II	11	46	18	18	4	97
III	22	42	31	30	5	130
IV	28	98	60	68	5	330
V	77	208	147	60	73	565
Total	146	424	269	161	90	1,090

b. Percentages of Full Time Staff Mainly in One Role

I	11%	42%	13%	21%	4%	63%
II	11	46	18	18	4	56
III	18	34	25	24	4	32
IV	11	39	24	25	2	53
V	14	37	27	11	13	67
Overall %	13	39	25	15	.5	55

c. Average Full Time Staff Working Mostly in One Role

I	.2	.6	.3	.3		1.4
II	.3	1.4	.6	.6		2.9
III	.4	.8	.6	.6		2.4
IV	1.0	3.5	2.0	1.4		11.8
V	2.8	7.4	5.3	2.1	.4	20.1
Overall	.8	2.2	1.4	.8	.5	5.7

Table 2 (cont'd.)

d. Number and Percentages of Prominent "Double" Roles Reported

	Air-Anchor & Staffers		Cameraman & Staffers	
	No.		No.	
I	41	38%	45	41%
II	41	24%	67	39%
III	46	11%	111	27%
IV	41	9%	93	21%
V	85	10%	75	9%
Overall	254	13%	706	36%

Table 3

Average Equipment United in U.S. News Departments

Budget Level	16mm Silent	16mm SOF	Still Cameras	Autos	Autos W2way	Wires
I	1.9	.8	2.1	.7	.6	1.0
II	4.8	2.0	2.4	.9	1.6	1.5
III	5.1	2.4	2.5	1.3	1.2	1.1
IV	5.6	3.5	2.6	2.4	2.6	2.1
V	9.1	6.9	2.0	2.6	5.9	3.5
Overall	5.3	1.9	2.3	2.6	2.4	1.8

Future Equipment Purchase Plans

	16mm Silent	16mm SOF	Port. VTR	Autos	Film Pros. & Engineering
I	12%	40%	4%	0	27%
II	10	64	15	9	15
III	0	50	11	12	12
IV	0	46	11	21	4
V	6	49	8	10	25
Overall	6	49	8	10	17

Table 4

Equipment Used in Gathering and Recording News Material

	0 %	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	6-8 %	9-11 %	12-15 %	16-20 %
Still Cameras										
Polaroid.....	56	26	14	2	2	1	1	0	0	0
35mm.....	18	33	32	7	6	2	1	0	0	0
Other.....	95	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Film Cameras										
Silent 16mm.....	7	5	15	7	17	9	28	10	2	1
Sound 16mm.....	11	20	28	17	8	4	8	3	1	1
Silent-Sound 8mm..	99	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other										
Port. VTR.....	91	7	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mobile Van.....	85	12	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Automobiles.....	47	19	14	8	7	0	4	1	0	0
Autos w/2way.....	31	11	18	11	11	4	10	1	0	0
Audio tape machines	11	11	21	18	10	7	12	4	5	1

Table 5

Department Holdings in 16mm Cameras

Budget Category	0 %	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	6-8 %	9-11 %	12-15 %	16-20 %
I	21	21	29	15	13	2	0	0	0	0
II	0	0	9	9	30	15	36	0	0	0
III	6	0	11	4	24	15	33	9	0	0
IV	0	0	11	0	11	11	36	32	0	0
V	0	0	0	4	4	4	46	21	14	7

(16mm SOF)

	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I	37	36	15	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
II	6	33	46	3	9	3	0	0	0	0
III	4	11	49	26	7	2	0	0	0	0
IV	0	0	14	46	21	11	7	0	0	0
V	0	0	0	14	7	7	43	21	7	0

Table 6

Average Newscasts by Budget Category

Budget Category	5min	15min	30min	60 min
I	1.9	1.0	1.2	.1
II	2.5	.5	1.8	.1
III	1.5	3.5	1.1	.1
IV	1.5	.2	2.2	.1
V	2.3	.7	2.1	.5
Overall	1.9	.6	1.5	.2